

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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### **EVERY LEGISLATION ON CHILD ABUSE REPORTING PASSED OUT OF COMMITTEE**

INDIANAPOLIS -- House Bill 1699, legislation authored by State Rep. Dennis Avery (D-Evansville), passed out of the House Committee on Family, Children and Human Affairs today by a vote of 7 - 0. The bill deals with criminal history checks for families with whom children will be placed and specifies what information a judge can release to the public in the event of a child's death as a result of abuse or neglect.

Avery authored this bill in response to legislation that he authored in a previous session. The earlier legislation required the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) to perform criminal history checks on families with whom children might be placed. However, the FSSA did not have the required standing to be able to request criminal history checks. House Bill 1699 remedies this situation.

Upon a child's placement in a home, the state police are required to perform a criminal history check on the family with whom the child will be living. Within 72 hours of placement, an FBI fingerprint check will be conducted. Children who are removed from their homes are often placed with relatives who, due to a loophole in the law, were not required to have criminal history checks. House Bill 1699 closes this loophole.

"House Bill 1699 will help to protect children, no matter with whom they are placed," said Avery. "There is no reason that all families with whom children are going to be placed should not be checked. The safety of a child should be our utmost concern."

House Bill 1699 will also clarify which information regarding the death of a child while in the custody of the FSSA can be released for publication. This clarification came in response to problems that arose when news outlets tried to gather information from the FSSA about a child's death and were denied. The FSSA had not yet finished its investigation into the cause of the child's death and therefore refused to release the information. It will now take only the determination of a single entity, such as the FSSA or a prosecuting attorney, that a child's death is due to neglect or abuse, for the records on that child to be released.

What information can and cannot be released is also outlined by House Bill 1699. This will go a long way to eliminating the confusion as to what information was and was not allowable. Before information could be released, some counties would eliminate much of the information they had regarding a child's death. This would contribute very little information.

"When a child dies, we need to know everything that happened, so we can determine what went wrong and what we can do to make sure that it doesn't happen again," said Avery.

House Bill 1699 received a large amount of support from child protection groups throughout the state. Kathy Graham of IARCA, Becky Pryor of Creative Approaches, Steve Key of the Hoosier Press Association, Dorell Watson-Duvall of Kids First, Steve Hillman of the Indiana State Police and the Child Welfare League of America all came out in support for this legislation.

House Bill 1699 now moves to the full House for further consideration.